

# SIGN REGULATIONS



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A faint, out-of-focus background image of a classical building, possibly a temple or a government building, featuring four prominent columns supporting a triangular pediment. The building is rendered in a light beige or cream color, blending with the overall warm tone of the image.

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February 15, 1962

Mr. Gardner W. Mein, President  
City Planning Commission  
100 Larkin Street  
San Francisco 2, California.

Dear Mr. Mein:

Presented to you and members of the City Planning Commission today is a draft of a proposed comprehensive city-wide sign control ordinance.

The brief report which follows this letter sets forth the objectives of the ordinance, describes the need for it, and summarizes and illustrates the basic provisions of the proposed legislation.

It is anticipated that the Sign Committee of the City Planning Commission will review the proposals of the draft ordinance with affected industry groups, downtown and district merchants, property owners and citizen organizations. Thereafter the ordinance with any modifications resulting from such review will be submitted to the full commission for consideration at a formal public hearing, and final recommendations will be transmitted by the City Planning Commission to the Board of Supervisors for legislative action.

Very truly yours,

*James R. McCarthy*  
James R. McCarthy  
Director of Planning

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## SIGN REGULATIONS

## OBJECTIVES:

A city without signs would be a monotonous and confusing place.

A city with no sign regulations presents aspects which are incongruous, distasteful, and even disruptive to the general public welfare. The sign ordinance presented in preliminary draft today seeks to provide for San Francisco a comprehensive guide to the location, size, and placement of signs throughout the city, so that signs of whatever nature may achieve their purpose and be compatible with the surrounding scene.

The basic objectives of the City Planning Commission in proposing the adoption of a sign control ordinance are to protect and preserve the integrity of residential areas, the character and dignity of public buildings and parks and other public open spaces, the public investment in freeways and other thoroughfares, and the general prospect of the city and its skyline.



## THE NEED FOR A SIGN ORDINANCE:

In San Francisco there are sign regulations in various city codes and in the Charter. Present rules governing signs are the gradual accretion of amendments and additions to existing ordinances or codes, enacted as the need arose or pressure demanded. For instance, the primary purpose of Article 47 of the Building Code is to regulate the structural and safety aspects of signs. However, Sections 4721 and 4722 have been added and amended to prohibit billboards and regulate signs adjacent to sections of certain freeways and along certain scenic streets.

The City Planning Code regulates the location of signs as commercial uses in the various zoning districts, and makes provision for the gradual removal of non-conforming signs. In 1959, on the basis of its discretionary powers, the City Planning Commission established by resolution a policy of reviewing permit applications for signs in excess of 32 feet above the sidewalk elevation, and for signs on roof



tops. A second resolution, in 1960, included in this review all applications for sign permits on property adjoining a residential zone.

The City Charter requires approval by the Board of Supervisors of signs on city property.

The Police Code, by prohibiting obstructions on the sidewalks, forbids sandwich boards and other signs placed directly on the sidewalk.

The Art Commission under Section 46 of the Charter has jurisdiction over signs which project over city-owned sidewalks.

The adverse effect of this piecemeal and uncoordinated regulation has long been acknowledged. The need now is for a sign ordinance to provide overall rather than piecemeal regulation, to cover many situations not covered by existing codes, and to enact into law explicitly stated standards rather than relying on a discretionary policy which can be inconsistent.

Recognizing this need the Board of Supervisors in 1960 requested the City Planning Commission to submit for consideration a comprehensive, city-wide sign control ordinance.



MAJOR CHANGES WHICH THE NEW SIGN ORDINANCE WOULD REQUIRE IN PRESENT LAWS:

It is proposed that the sign ordinance become Article 6 of the City Planning Code, and for ease of administration and better understanding by the public the sign regulations now in other articles of this code, would be transferred to Article 6. Some of the present provisions of the code, however, are proposed to be modified or repealed since they are in conflict with the purposes of the new article. Some changes will also be required in the Building Code so that it will correspond to the new ordinance.

Building Code Sections 4721 and 4722, dealing with signs along freeways and along certain scenic streets, are transferred to Article 6, thus making the Department of City Planning the department responsible for administration and enforcement of the ordinance. Section 4721 is extensively revised to make it apply to all freeways, those existing and any to be built in the future, and to eliminate the exceptions which have made it ineffective. Several streets are added to those already listed in Section 4722.



The major change to the present Planning Code is the prohibition of general advertising signs in all residential districts.

Other new provisions would establish maximum projection of signs in all districts, maximum heights for business signs in the neighborhood and community shopping districts, maximum sizes and heights for pole signs, and maximum heights for other free standing signs, and would prohibit general advertising signs along streets bordering parks, in the vicinity of the Civic Center, on roof tops and on or adjacent to residential buildings.

The following pictures show specific conditions which the proposed ordinance seeks to regulate.

(Cover photograph: View from the new Hall of Justice by Pirkle Jones )





The proposed sign regulations would limit the projection of business signs. A sign like this in a C-1 district would be reduced almost by half to a projection of 10 feet. (Monterey Boulevard and Gennessee Street.)



The proposed sign regulations would permit the type of pole sign and fin sign used at this gas station at 38th Avenue and Noriega Street. The business sign on the market projects about 10 feet above the roofline and would be permitted. The billboard would be reduced in height to 24 feet.



Gas station signs would be regulated. The pole signs shown here would each be reduced in size and the Texaco sign would be lowered.







Billboards such as this one facing a park would not be permitted by the proposed sign regulations.  
(Fulton Street and 25th Avenue.)





The proposed sign regulations would prohibit general advertising signs on residential property. (Geary Boulevard between Baker and Lyon Streets.)



The proposed sign regulations would prohibit free standing general advertising signs more than 24 feet high.  
(California Street and Presidio Avenue.)





The proposed sign regulations would prohibit general advertising signs around the Civic Center. (City Hall as seen from Van Ness and Golden Gate Avenues.)







The proposed sign regulations would prohibit general advertising signs along all freeways.





## BASIC PROVISIONS OF THE PROPOSED SIGN ORDINANCE

The proposed sign ordinance makes an important distinction between two kinds of signs:

A business sign is located on the premises of the business advertised.

A general advertising sign advertises products or services which are sold elsewhere than upon the premises where it is located and only incidentally on the premises if at all.

Most of the provisions in the zoning ordinance regarding signs are carried forward into the sign ordinance. The outstanding exception is that the proposed ordinance prohibits general advertising signs (usually either billboards or painted wall signs) in residential districts. In addition, the proposed ordinance contains new provisions as to the height, projection, location and in some cases the size of signs.

Projecting signs. In residential districts, business signs on legal non-conforming commercial parcels must be flat against the wall of the building as is required by existing regulations. In commercial and industrial districts, signs would be allowed to project from the property line 75 per cent of the sidewalk width.

Height of business signs. In neighborhood and community shopping districts (the C-1 and C-2 zones), the height of signs on the businesses advertised would be restricted to 10 feet above the roof, in keeping with the character and scale of these districts and the neighborhoods of which they are a part.

However, business signs along certain streets -- the Mission Miracle Mile, Lombard Street, upper Market Street, Van Ness Avenue and Geary Boulevard -- would have a height allowance of 32 feet or 10 feet above the roofline, whichever is higher. In the central business district (the C-3 zone) and the industrial districts (the C-M, M-1 and M-2 zones), there would be no height limit on business signs.

Pole signs would be limited in size and height in all districts by regulations similar to those in effect now for filling stations along freeways and some streets.

Banners strung together in a series, now commonly used at filling stations and used car lots, would be banned throughout the city.

Sign towers would be prohibited in the neighborhood and community shopping districts.

General advertising signs. The following regulations are proposed for general advertising signs: to be prohibited in residential zones or on the premises of a residential building in any district; free standing billboards restricted in height to 24 feet to the top of the sign; prohibited above the roofline or on the roof of any building; prohibited adjacent to parks, schools, around the Civic Center, along certain streets such as 19th Avenue, and adjacent to any freeway.





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